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RELATIONS OF THE EAST TO THE WEST

By M. ZUMOTO,

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Mr. President, Members of the Academy, Ladies and Gentlemen: I consider it a great honor to be allowed to address the members of this important society to-night. I am the more grateful for this favor because the subject I am to discuss, "The Relations of the East to the West," is of peculiar interest to me.

The question has often been asked, and is still asked: Are the East and the West to remain separate and aloof from each other, mutually distrustful and unknowable? Unfortunately, the question has been answered in the affirmative by not a few writers of distinction, both here and in Europe. To those Orientals who have considered the question at all, and to those rare Occidentals who have been able to make a close and personal study of the Oriental mind, this question presents no difficulty. To them it is quite obvious that there is no inherent, insuperable difficulty for the West to understand the East, or vice versa. The Oriental and Occidental minds are essentially alike; the heart of the Asiatic is warmed by the same sentiments of love and sympathy that touch the heart of an American.

As a matter of fact, the East has long since succeeded in solving this problem to its entire satisfaction. The Japanese, at least, have done so. There were times when we, too, thought of the Occidentals as monsters, thinking and feeling quite differently from us. But that was half a century ago, and once our eyes were rudely opened we applied all our energies to the study of the Occidental mind and all the wonderful things and institutions which it has produced. The result is that we now know the West nearly as well as the West knows itself. We know, for instance, enough of the history and character of the American people, of their phenomenal capacity for growth and development, and of their lofty national aims and aspirations, to fill our minds with profound admiration for them, and to perceive that as friends they would be, we Japanese know

them to be, lovable and valuable, while as enemies they would be more formidable and dreadful than any other people on earth.

Now, if the East can understand the West, there is no reason whatever why the West should not be able to understand the East. The West, it seems to me, is just beginning to feel that the East is not incomprehensible; the West is beginning, at least, to feel the necessity of understanding the East, and I heartily welcome this awakening of the West as to the existence of a vast domain of mind in Asia, which it can no longer ignore without serious injury and danger to itself. Japan made the same discovery with respect to the West fifty years ago. You are half a century behind us in this respect. But, better late than never, and I sincerely congratulate you upon your tardy but auspicious awakening.

In studying the East you will have to pursue the same method which we have pursued in studying you. In other words, you must study the East through its language and literature. You must talk to it and feel with it, mind to mind, heart to heart. In no other way can one people be understood by another.

It is often said that the Oriental mind is inscrutable. If by that it is meant that we Orientals are less frank and direct in expression of our feelings than Occidentals, I am bound to say that there is some truth in it. But let me tell you that that indirectness and reserve is only a superficial and, with the Japanese at least, an acquired characteristic. Furthermore, this characteristic is only in operation in personal and direct relations between man and man, where the innate politeness and refinement of sentiment prevents the Japanese from telling the bare truth, whenever so doing may seem rude or unpleasant to him with whom he may be conversing. Then, again, according to our moral code, to show anger or grief, pain or pleasure, is a mark of weakness of will, unworthy of a gentleman.

No such unnatural restraint, however, is observed when the Japanese commits his or her thoughts to writing. There, save for some special and exceptional reasons, the Japanese, like men of every other race, vents his views or sentiments without any restraint or reserve.

It may be interesting to illustrate this point by referring to the first political embassy ever sent to this country by Japan. I mean the embassy headed by Lord Shimmi, which visited this country

in 1860. It is not difficult to imagine how dignified and polite these high officials from the Shogunate court of Yedo must have been in their relations with the people of this country. Yet it is interesting to note that the head of the embassy, Lord Shimmi, has left a diary of the visit, in which he faithfully and frankly recorded his impressions of what he saw in America—impressions which, in most instances, look quaint to the Japanese of to-day, and which are not always favorable to the Americans.

Let me quote one or two instances. At San Francisco, the first port the Japanese visitors touched in America, they were given a big dinner by the Mayor. In his diary Lord Shimmi says: "True friendliness was observable at to-night's function, but, if one might be permitted to speak badly of it, it suggested to one's mind a carousal such as might be gotten up by workingmen in a cheap drinking-shop of Yedo." The frank and unconventional joviality of the jolly citizens of San Francisco of those days seems to have been too much for the staid and quiet ministers of the Shogun, accustomed to rigid conventional rules of conduct.

To quote another passage: Referring to his experience at the Senate in Washington, this noble chronicler remarks that "the men in tight trousers and narrow sleeves, gesticulating in a frantic manner in front of the Vice-President, perched on an elevated seat, strongly reminded me of the familiar daily scene at the fish market of Nihon Bashi." The writer little dreamed that sixty years later his own descendants, and the descendants of his colleagues, would be actors in exactly similar scenes at a similar hall of legislation at Tokyo.

If the Japanese of those days were so outspoken, you can easily imagine how unreserved the Japanese of to-day can be. I dare say that sixty years hence the diaries of some of the members of the commercial party now visiting you will be as curious and interesting as the diary of Lord Shimmi.

In one thing I may be permitted to anticipate what might be revealed by the diaries of my friends of the party. We have discovered many things in the course of this trip, and not the least important or surprising is the ignorance of the American people concerning Japan and things Japanese—an ignorance which for its degree and extent can only be described as stupendous. Questions are constantly asked, not in remote interior cities alone, but every-

where, even in national centers of intelligence like New York, or Boston, or Chicago—questions which show that we are still a sealed book to you. I do not mean to blame Americans for that, but I must say that the prevalence of such dense ignorance among this people about the Japanese and things Japanese is a source of serious danger to the permanence of those close ties of friendship which it is the desire of both nations may bind them forever. This ignorance on their part cannot but make American people easy victims of mischief-mongers who see profit in excitement and trouble.

The same may be said of the relations between your country and China, or any other Asiatic nation, or, in fact, between the West and the East in general. It is now high time that the West should seriously set about studying the East. The negligence of this obvious lesson of contemporary history may be fraught with dire consequences to the civilization and welfare of the world.